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SHAKSPERE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

IN estimating the seventeenth century's appreciation of Shakspeare, we are accustomed to ascribe too much importance to the literary criticism of that time, while another witness, one whose voice is as weighty, and in fact decisive, as it is unmistakable, has not yet been accorded adequate attention. The subject of our present study, then, is the stage history of Shakspeare's plays during the seventeenth century.

With regard to my sources and authorities, I have to say that, whenever possible, I have consulted the original documents, either in facsimile or reprints. My conclusions, therefore, are chiefly my own. As the original documents, however, are often inaccessible, I have found it convenient to refer to Fleay, whose works (*Life and Work of Shakspeare; History of the London Stage, 1559-1642*) are important and valuable. But I have referred to him only when I know from my own investigation that he is correct, for his volumes are a curious jumble of facts, misstatements, and conjectures treated as facts. (Cf. *Englische Studien*, XVIII, pp. 111-125, where Professor Boyle of St. Petersburg pays his respects to Mr. Fleay.)

Other authorities, easily accessible and thoroughly reliable, are :

Pepys' *Diary*, edited by Lord Braybrooke, with additions by Rev. Mynors Bright.

Genest's *History of the Drama and Stage in England from 1660 to 1830*, volumes 1 and 2.

Malone's *Variorum of 1821*, volumes 1 to 3.

Henslow's *Diary* is, so far as I know, edited only by J. P. Collier, and therefore is possibly unreliable.

By the term seventeenth century, I mean, of course, the time from Shakspeare's first appearance in London to 1699; and

it is convenient to divide this into two periods, one ending with the closing of the theatres in 1642, and the other beginning in 1660 and ending in 1699.

For the period before 1642, a very few general statements will suffice. Although we know the names of at least a dozen London theatres, and of as many companies, the task of tracing Shakspeare's plays is much simplified by the fact that there were never more than five companies playing in London at the same time, and farther, that, so far as we know, only one company ever produced a Shaksperian play. This company was known until 1588 as Leicester's; from 1588 to 1594 as Lord Strange's; from 1594 to 1603 as the Lord Chamberlain's; and from 1603 to 1642 as the King's. But as Shakspeare wrote only for this company, and acted only in it, we may call it Shakspeare's.

Obviously, if we could know of all the performances of Shakspeare's company, we should know precisely how often Shakspeare's plays were given by that company, though we should still need to know the relative popularity of Shakspeare's company. We know that performances ceased whenever the plague deaths in the city rose to twenty per week, so that the bills of mortality furnish a tolerably accurate record of when the theatres were closed. We know further, that after 1603, public performances were prohibited on Sunday (Malone, 3, 146), and, without special permission, on Wednesdays and Fridays in Lent (*ib.*, 3, 153).

So far, the facts seem to make the task of tracing Shakspeare's plays very easy, but we shall see that our positive information is too scanty to justify me in drawing many final conclusions as to Shakspeare's position.

The most important documents for this period are Henslow's *Diary* and the *Accounts of the Master of the Revels*. In these latter are the records of Court performances (of much importance in determining Shakspeare's standing with the Court); but as public performances were given in the afternoon (Malone, 3, 144), and Court performances usually at night (*ib.*, 3, 168), the *Revels Accounts* do not help us much in accounting for the public performances of Shakspeare's

company. Henslow's *Diary*, however, furnishes some very important information. From this *Diary* we learn that for some five months, in 1592, Shakspeare's company acted at Henslow's theatre, the Rose. According to Henslow's entries of his share of the receipts, no play, however popular, was given on two consecutive days. The *Diary* also contains entries of receipts from performances by other companies that played at the Rose. These entries, extending over some three and a half years, furnish only two cases where one play was given on two consecutive days, and these were at the very last, in 1597, and the plays were new. There are, however, some twenty cases where the first part of a play was followed by the second part on the next day.

We may not infer from a five months' record that Shakspeare's company never gave a play a run, in the modern sense of the word, but we may conclude that during the six years from 1592 to 1597 inclusive, such was not the custom with any company. My inference is supported by the title-page of a quarto edition of the *Rebellion*, dated 1640, where we read that the play was "acted nine dayes together, and divers times since," — the only statement of the kind I know of. The very fact that the statement was made goes to show that, even as late as 1640, a run was unusual. The most important inference, however, is that the records that we have are significant chiefly in a negative way. For example, if one witness should record a performance of the first part of *Henry Sixth* on February 3, 1592, and another witness should record another performance February 7th, we could infer, not that it was performed during the whole of that week, but that it was probably given on those two dates only.

As just said, Shakspeare's company played at the Rose for five months. During that time, the first part of *Henry Sixth* and *Jeronymo* were given sixteen times each, *Mulomorro* fourteen times, *Jew of Malta* thirteen times, and *Titus and Vespasia* ten times. No other of the twenty-five plays acted was given more than seven times. Seven of the plays were new ones, six of them in the last two months. The Admiral's men also played at the Rose from

June 15, 1594, until July 28, 1597, for a trifle over three years, playing all but six months of this time. During this period, the *Wise Man of West Chester* (not extant) was given thirty-one times, *Belin Dun* (not extant) twenty-four times, *Dr. Faustus* twenty-three times, *Seven Days* (not extant) twenty-two times, *Knack to Know an Honest Man* and the *Blind Beggar of Alexandria* twenty-one times each. (I give names in order to show of what sort the popular plays were.) *Tamburlaine* was given only fifteen times. In all there were seventy-two plays given, fifty of them new ones.

From the data just given, I infer : First, that Shakspeare's company certainly had the smaller repertory, and so kept fewer plays before the public at one time. Second, that Shakspeare's company played one play oftener in a given time than the Admiral's men did. Third, that the plays of Shakspeare's company were, as a rule, more carefully written and better acted than those of the Admiral's men. (For the sake of accuracy, I limit my comparison to the Admiral's men, though I feel tolerably certain that what I have said of it holds equally true of the other companies.) Fourth, that Shakspeare's plays were probably given oftener than those of his rivals who wrote for other companies.

For this period Mr. Fleay gives a list of some 250 actors. Of these the most prominent were Pope, Kempe, Edward Alleyn, Hemings, Condell, Shakspeare, and Burbadge. All these men were in Shakspeare's company at some time, and only Kempe and Alleyn ever acted with any other company. Hemings and Condell are familiar as the editors of the first folio ; while Burbadge is the only one well known to us as an actor.

We know of just 140 authors during this period who wrote plays acted by London companies. Of the twenty most important of these playwrights, Shakspeare and Nash are the only ones who wrote for but one company ; and of these twenty, Chapman, Kyd, Marston, and Nash are the only ones who never wrote for Shakspeare's company. So Shakspeare had to compete in his own company with most of the best of his contemporaries.

On December 27, 1591, Shakspeare's company played before the Queen, and immediately became the most popular with the Court. During the fifty years before the closing of the theatres, out of 488 recorded performances before the Court, this company gave 341, almost seven-tenths of the whole number. Patronage, no doubt, had something to do with this popularity, but I think that the character and policy of the company had even more weight. For some years the chief rival of Shakspeare's company was Henslow's. Henslow had usually in his employ twelve poets, and produced on an average a new play every two weeks. There is no evidence that Shakspeare's company ever employed more than three poets at one time, and it produced a new play only about once in two months. Henslow's plays were continually rewritten, renamed, and resold. Shakspeare's company rarely let a play pass out of its possession (*Hist. Stage*, pp. 117, 118).

As just said, the records of the Court performances show that Shakspeare's company was the most popular company at Court. A possible index of Shakspeare's own popularity is the number of his plays presented at Court. From 1594 to 1603, Shakspeare's company gave before Queen Elizabeth twenty-eight plays. During this time, the company produced twenty plays by Shakspeare, and eight by others. This agreement may be accidental, but it seems to show that Shakspeare was by far the most popular (*Life of S.*, 47). From 1603 to 1611, when Shakspeare left the company, it produced at Court twenty-one plays by Shakspeare, and twenty-seven by others. In 1612-13, out of twenty plays given, Shakspeare furnished nine. From 1618 to 1625, of twenty-three given, only five were Shakspeare's. After that, out of 147 given, we have actual record of only three that were Shakspeare's.

In all these years, we know positively of only 126 public performances of Shakspeare's plays. Of course we know that there must have been more than that, but of this fact the evidence is very unsatisfactory. Of the sixteen of Shakspeare's plays issued in quarto before the first folio, all but the first part of *Henry Fourth* have on the title-page some such

statement as "divers times acted," or "publicly acted." One, *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), has "as it hath been often (with great applause) played publicly." Such testimony, taken with the slow rate of production of Shakspeare's company, points to fairly numerous performances. The large number of editions of some plays seems to indicate their more or less frequent revival. For example, *Richard Third* and the first part of *Henry Fourth* are extant in eight quarto editions, *Richard Second* in four, and *Henry Fifth* in three.

No records have been found of the performance during this period of the second and third parts of *Henry Sixth*, *King John*, the second part of *Henry Fourth*, *As You Like It*, *All's Well*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Timon of Athens*, or *Coriolanus*, although they must have been produced soon after they were written. The second part of *Henry Fourth* is the only one of these plays extant in quarto.

There are records of two remarkable runs. In 1592, soon after the company had begun to play at the Rose, on the Bankside, the first part of *Henry Sixth* was played sixteen times, between March 3d and June 19th, to crowded houses (cf. p. 33; also *Hist. St.*, 74; *Life of S.*, 109). In the summer of 1601, *Richard Second* was played forty times (*Hist. St.*, 136; *Life of S.*, 143). This performance was largely due to politics, as Essex had been executed recently (February 25th), and the play was supposed to favor his party. At any rate, Essex's rivals were offended, and made trouble.

Next to *Richard Second* and the first part of *Henry Sixth* comes the *Winter's Tale* with seven recorded performances, followed by *Hamlet* and *Othello* with six each, and *Merry Wives* with five. *Julius Cæsar* has only four performances recorded, but Fleay says that in the four years following its first production, revenge plays were all the rage (*Life of S.*, 215).

It is evident that during his connection with the stage, Shakspeare was most popular. His falling off from 1603 to 1611 may be partly explained by the fact that six of those years were plague years, and in that time the theatres were closed nearly thirty-six months. Moreover, from 1604 to 1608 inclusive, Shakspeare produced but one play a year.

When we consider the facts that I have given, — namely, that Shakspeare's company was, after 1591, by far the most popular at Court, that it had always the best players, the fewest writers, and the smallest repertory, — and add the fact that the managers of the company were both stockholders and players, it is very clear that Shakspeare could not well have been better situated. He easily kept his supremacy until a little before his death. Fletcher, who began to write in 1608, soon came to the front, and after 1616, with Massinger, by mere dint of being prolific, almost shut Shakspeare from the stage.

(In August, 1642, the theatres were closed, and several of the players went into the army. In 1648, after the close of hostilities, some of the old players got together and played for three or four days at the Cockpit, but were arrested. Private performances were rather numerous, however, especially after 1656. In 1659 a scrub company played *Pericles*.)

After the Restoration, plays were no longer given on the old system of one-night performances and a large repertory, but were played as long as they would draw. The old plays, after a first revival, were commonly given only as stop-gaps. For a new play less than three nights was considered a failure, and more than six was commented on as unusual. Downes mentions perhaps a dozen plays that ran from twelve to fifteen nights together.

Two novelties were introduced. Scenes were used from the first, and after a time the Duke's company, in order to keep pace with the more popular and abler King's company, introduced operas and developed the spectacular play, in imitation of the elaborate masks of the reign of James. Because of the scandal that had been made by men acting women's parts, the patents of the companies contained clauses especially permitting women to act. The women, however, almost immediately began to act "breeches parts," so that plays were still chosen for the hero, and not for the heroine, as later.

From 1660 to 1700 there were never in London more than two companies of actors, and a part of the time there was only one company. In August, 1660, Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant each obtained from the King a patent permitting them to build theatres and raise companies. New patents were granted them in 1662. Killigrew's company was known as the King's, and played at the Theatre Royal. Davenant's company was known as the Duke of York's, and played at Lincoln's Inn Fields until 1671, and then at Dorset Garden. In November, 1682, both companies were united and played at the Theatre Royal, but still used Dorset Garden for the more spectacular plays. In 1695 some of the disaffected members, headed by Betterton, managed to break away from the old company, and started a new theatre known as the "theater in little Lincoln's Inn Fields."

For some time both companies were kept busy reviving old plays, and a rule was made that an old play should become the property of the company first reviving it. It was not very long, however, before a new set of playwrights sprang up and demanded recognition.

The authorities for this period are the *Diaries* of Pepys and of Evelyn, Downes' *Roscius Anglicanus*, and memoranda by Sir Henry Herbert (in the *Variorum* of 1821, Vol. 3, pp. 273-6). Evelyn records some twenty times that he saw plays, but does not often tell where, or even what he saw. Downes, for years prompter for the Duke's men, published in 1708 *Roscius Anglicanus*, a little book which purported to be an account of the English stage from the Restoration. (The only known copy of this book is in the Bodleian Library, but a few years ago some one printed in facsimile thirty-six copies, one of which is in the Harvard Library.) Downes tells us that such and such plays were given by one or another of the companies, but rarely gives an accurate date. Sir Henry Herbert's list furnishes fifty-seven dates, most of which are correct. Pepys' testimony, however, is the most important. He was nearly always careful to tell where he went and what he saw. We have altogether actual records of 323 performances of 141 plays, and of these Pepys

saw 236 performances of 106 plays. When we remember that between October, 1660, and December, 1699, there must have been close upon 12,000 performances, it is evident that our information is scanty. (Three hundred performances a year by one company only would in forty years amount to 12,000; and for twenty-seven years there were two companies.) It is utterly impossible, therefore, with our present information to tell even approximately how many performances of Shakspeare were given. I am inclined to think (though it is only an opinion) that Pepys saw nearly all given between 1661 and 1669, mainly because he so often records that a play was given for the first time, and a few nights later for the second or third time. A good example of this was in August, 1667. Pepys records on the 15th that *Sir Martin Mar-All* was given by the Duke's men for the first time. He saw it again on the 16th and 19th. On the 20th he saw it once more, and says that it was the fourth time it was given. If he had not been so explicit, we might have supposed that it was given on the 17th and 18th also. Again, the records show that old plays were often, if not always, given on one night only, sometimes between two performances of another play. For example, in September, 1668, the King's men gave *Rollo* on the 17th, the first part of *Henry Fourth* on the 18th, and *Epicæne* on the 19th; and in April, 1667, the Duke's men gave *Macbeth* on the 19th, and the *Wits* on the 18th and 20th.

In this period only eleven plays of Shakspeare's were revived unaltered, and of them there is actual record of just fifty performances (thirty-one recorded by Pepys), and forty-seven altogether before 1670. If the proportion would hold good for the next thirty years, we should have 188 performances, as compared with the 126 of the period before 1642. While there are only fifty distinctly recorded performances, there are several such statements as that of Downes, that "no succeeding Tragedy for several years got more reputation or money to the company than" *Hamlet* (*Rosc. Ang.*, 21).

In 1662, after *Romeo and Juliet* had been played several times, James Howard changed it so as to end happily, and

this version was acted alternately with the original for some time (*Rosc. Ang.*, 22). In December, 1662, the Duke's men played Davenant's *Law against Lovers*, a combination of *Much Ado* and *Measure for Measure*.

In 1667 appeared two alterations; the first a version of the *Taming of the Shrew*, called *Sawny the Scot*, by one Lacy, which was given by the King's men in April and again in November. On November 7th the Duke's men brought out Dryden and Davenant's *Tempest*, which Pepys heard seven times in the next two years. The real *Macbeth*, first produced in 1664, and which was very popular (Pepys heard it eight times), was replaced in 1672 by Davenant's version, which was equally popular. In 1673 Shadwell made the *Tempest* into an opera which was given by the Duke's men. Downes records that "no succeeding opera brought more money" (*Rosc. Ang.*, 34).

In 1678 Shadwell again tried his hand at mutilating Shakspeare, this time with *Timon of Athens*, also played by the Duke's men. In this same year, 1678, the King's men produced Ravenscroft's brutalization of *Titus Andronicus*, and Dryden's *All for Love*, a professed imitation of *Antony and Cleopatra*. This last play was very popular, and kept the original off the stage for considerably over a hundred years. In 1679 the Duke's men played Dryden's *Troilus and Cressida*, and in 1680 Caius Marius, Otway's version of *Romeo and Juliet*, which was frequently acted until 1744. In 1681 the same company gave an alteration of *Lear*, by Nahum Tate, who later in the year wrote for the King's men the *Sicilian Usurper*, an alteration of *Richard Second*. In this year the Duke's men also produced a condensation of the first and second parts of *Henry Sixth*, by Crowne.

In 1682, before the union of the companies, the King's men played the *Injured Princess, or the Fatal Wager*, Durfey's alteration of *Cymbeline*, and the *Ingratitude of a Commonwealth*, Tate's version of *Coriolanus*. In 1692 the companies gave the *Fairy Queen*, an alteration of *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, by Robert Cox. In 1698 *Sawny the Scot* was revived.

In the Restoration Period, then (if we include a performance of *Pericles* in 1659), twelve of Shakspeare's plays were given unaltered, of which *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, *Macbeth*, and *Lear* were altered later, and *Romeo and Juliet* and the *Tempest* were altered twice. In addition, thirteen plays were given altered; so that, in some form or other, twenty-five plays were put on the stage between 1659 and 1699.

In the period before 1642, we have actual record of the performance of twenty-seven of Shakspeare's plays; of the others, all were first printed in the first folio, except the second part of *Henry Fourth*, the title-page of which affirms that it was "sundry times publicly" acted.

Of the plays of which we have no recorded performances before 1642, four (*Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, the second part of *Henry Sixth*, and *Timon of Athens*) were put on the Restoration stage in altered form; one of these (Dryden's *All for Love*) was very popular. On the other hand, seven plays of the period before 1642 were not given in the Restoration Period: the *Comedy of Errors*, *Henry Fifth*, *Love's Labor's Lost*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Pericles*, *Richard Third*, and the *Winter's Tale*. Of these, *Richard Third* and *Henry Fifth* were probably kept from the stage by Carrol's *Richard the Third, or the English Princess*, and by the Earl of Orrery's *Henry Fifth*, both given by the Duke's men, one in 1664, the other in 1667.

We have already seen (p. 35) that in Shakspeare's lifetime, his plays were decidedly popular, at least with the Court. Surely the figures just given for the two periods do not show so very great a falling off in popularity.

In Boston, in the last forty years (exactly the length of the Restoration Period) only twenty-eight of Shakspeare's plays have been given, as against twenty-five in the Restoration. (For this statement, I am indebted to Mr. Edwin Francis Edgett, dramatic editor of the Boston Evening *Transcript*. He adds: "This gives all except *All's Well*, the second part of *Henry Fourth*, the three parts of *Henry Sixth*, *Pericles*, *Timon of Athens*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Troilus and Cressida*."

I cannot assert positively that these have not been given, but I don't think they have" (Letter, March 17, 1896).

If we take now the totals, — twenty-seven before 1642, twenty-five between 1659 and 1699, and twenty-eight in Boston in forty years, — we must conclude (even if we grant that all of the thirty-seven plays commonly called Shakspeare's were acted before 1642), that Shakspeare was much more popular with the Restoration public than has been generally supposed. This opinion is strengthened when we consider that only about twenty of Beaumont and Fletcher's fifty plays were given, and only six or eight of Jonson's (though nearly all he wrote). Moreover, Shakspeare was farther away in time, and according to Jonson (whose literary dictatorship was then unquestioned) "wanted art," so that he really held his own against odds.

We shall be confirmed in this opinion if we inquire into the reasons for the relative popularity of individual plays. The three parts of *Henry Sixth* are not acted because, by a practically unanimous verdict, they are (as compared with Shakspeare's other plays) poor. The third part of *Henry Sixth* has, so far as we know, never been acted. *All's Well* is out of the question because of its hopelessly unpleasant plot, though why that did not recommend it to the Restoration is a puzzle. The second part of *Henry Fourth* has not, so far as we know, been acted since its first publication in quarto in 1600. The reason seems to be that it is a second part, for two-part plays are certainly not in favor. The fact that the Restoration enjoyed *Titus Andronicus* brutalized, while we enjoy the *Merchant of Venice* and the *Winter's Tale*, is significant.

Nine plays were given in Boston that were not given in the Restoration period. Of these, *Henry Fifth* and *Richard Third* have already been accounted for (p. 41). Others may be accounted for by the character of the companies. In the Restoration, the stars were men, if we except Nell Gwyn, whose talents seem to have been of the music-hall order. Nowadays, with companies headed by actresses, plays in which the heroine has the chief part are in demand. Rosa-

lind has more lines than any other of Shakspeare's heroines, so *As You Like It* is distinctly popular with actresses. For a similar reason Beatrice makes *Much Ado* popular. The success of Sardou's *Cleopatra*, as acted by Mme. Bernhardt and Fanny Davenport, has, since 1890, at least, kept *Antony and Cleopatra* from being often acted. Mrs. Brown Potter is the only actress I know of who has staged it, and she apparently chose it (as she certainly did *Romeo and Juliet*) because it furnishes opportunities for vulgar realism.

The number of reputable companies is also to be considered. In the Restoration period, there were never more than two companies in London, and for several years only one company. Now, the increased number of companies means an increased demand for his plays. Indeed, with criticism unanimously and emphatically in Shakspeare's favor, this age ought to go far ahead of the Restoration period, with its criticism almost dead against Shakspeare. And yet, Shakspeare fared almost as well on the Restoration stage as he does on the English stage to-day.

Surely I need not review in detail the seventeenth century's criticism of Shakspeare. Its chief characteristic is an astounding inability to see that Shakspeare was in any wise better than many of the men who are now considered among the poorest of their time. Jonson's criticisms were, from his point of view, discriminating and just. Unfortunately, Jonson's followers overlooked entirely his hearty praise, but caught up the dictum that Shakspeare "wanted art." Dryden's criticisms, from 1664 to 1694 (?), contain some apparent contradictions, but, taken all together, show a growing sense of Shakspeare's preëminence. For the rest, the general criticism of the century was amazingly incompetent. Ben Jonson hits off this criticism in a way that commends itself. In his *Discoveries* (*Censura de poetis*) he says, "Nothing in our age, I have observed, is more preposterous than the running judgments upon poetry and poets; when we shall hear those things commended and cried up for the best writings, which a man would scarce vouchsafe to wrap any wholesome drug in; he would never light his tobacco with them."

Plainly, the testimony of the critics does not agree with that of the stage history. So far as I have investigated, however, all the details go against the critics. The allusions in the literature of the time (excluding the title-pages of the quartos, and entries in the *Stationers' Register*, or in book catalogues) are almost uniformly favorable. More plays were wrongly ascribed to Shakspeare than to any one else, and among these plays were the most popular of the anonymous plays given by Shakspeare's company. Lastly, Shakspeare's plays went through more editions than those of any other dramatists. So we must conclude, as I said at first, that it is not fair to judge of Shakspeare's popularity in the seventeenth century by its criticism alone.

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